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MORAL AND LITERARY TRAINING

IN

PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

BY

JOHN B. PEASLEE, LL. D.

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MORAL AND LITERARY TRAINING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

BY JOHN B. PEASLEE, LL. D.

I SHALL not discuss the methods by which English literature is now taught in our high schools and colleges, as the literary work which I shall advocate in this paper will not interfere in the least with that which these institutions are endeavoring to accomplish, but will be additional and supplementary to their noble work. That my position may not be misunderstood, I desire to say in the outset that I am decidedly in favor of retaining the present systematic study of English literature as a *distinct branch* in these institutions; instead of substituting anything for this work, as some erroneously suppose, I would give much more of it. In my opinion, however, our high-school courses of study in English literature *should begin with the authors of to-day* (*American*) *and go back to Chaucer*, instead of beginning with Chaucer and coming down to the present time.

I desire, before entering fully upon my subject, to call the attention of educators to some of the mistakes that must be corrected before the public schools of our country can reach the highest standard of excellence in literary and moral training. One of these is the disproportionate amount of time given to the subject of arithmetic. Arithmetic has been and ever must be one of the fundamental branches of our common-school curriculum, and I yield to no man in my estimate of the importance of the subject, both in regard to what is usually considered as its practical bearing upon the business affairs of life, and its excellence as a means of mental discipline. Nor am I among those who would cut down the course of study in arithmetic to a few subjects, to those only that are generally considered absolutely necessary for all to know, to that only which is called "practical." Practical! there is a higher practical than the mere use that some of us may make of it in adding up our grocers' bills, or perchance in calculating discount and interest. The mental discipline, the strengthening of the mind, the intellectual power that the scholar obtains by the study of this subject, is the *real practical*, the *higher practical*. It will never do to confine our courses of study in mathematics to that only which popular opinion considers practical. I object, therefore, not that there is too much ground covered in the arithmetic, or that it is too well taught, but that there is too much time given to it.*

* NOTE. — This has grown out of the mistaken notion of parents and teachers that the more time there is given to a study, the more the pupils will necessarily learn of that study.

President Andrews, of Marietta, Ohio, who is known to be exceedingly accurate in his statements, says that more than one half of the time of the schools of that State, outside of the cities and large towns, is given to arithmetic. Think of it: more time devoted to this one subject than to reading, writing, spelling, geography, and grammar combined; none to literature and composition! And what is true of the schools of Ohio in this respect is true of those of most, at least, of the other States. Let the teachers of these schools cut down the time given to this subject to within the bounds of reason; introduce composition, letter-writing, and business forms; let them stop working puzzles in mathematics which are about as profitable as the famous fifteen puzzle, and turn their attention to reading, to improving themselves in literature, to acquainting themselves with the lives and writings of great authors: and let them take the results of that work into their school-rooms, and they would revolutionize the country schools of the United States.

In our city schools, less time, to be sure, is given in the programmes; still, taking into consideration the amount of home work required of the pupils, and the extra time taken to "bring up" the arithmetic, it is entirely too much. A half-hour per day in the lower grades, and forty minutes in the upper, are amply sufficient. But the teachers have been made to feel that high per cents in arithmetic are the *sine qua non* of their success; hence, driving and cramming for per cents largely take the place of judicious teaching, to the great detriment of the pupils.

Fellow-teachers, let us use all our influence against this cramming, stultifying process, this driving for per cents, and teach according

Paradoxical as it may seem, the children of our *district schools* would learn just as much arithmetic as they now do if less than one half of the present average amount of time were given to it. A little child can learn something of a number of subjects, and not much of any one. It can learn as much arithmetic, on an average, in one hour a day as in ten; for in the hour its mind will take all it can assimilate, and any attempt to teach it more than this becomes a cramming, a stultifying process, and defeats its own end.

Teachers should therefore bear in mind, in making out their time-tables of study and recitations, that only a limited amount of time per day can be *profitably* given to any one subject in the lower grades of the schools.

It will be remembered that in London a few years ago half-time schools were established for the youth who were compelled by necessity to work in factories, etc. The school inspectors thought, of course, the pupils who attended these schools could accomplish only one half as much as those who attended the full time. Imagine their surprise and astonishment to find, after careful and thorough investigation, that the half-time pupils not only kept up with the others, but surpassed them in their studies. Let me say here, by way of parenthesis, that the fault of too much study for little children lies in the direction of cramming in some of the branches, and not in the variety of studies; that diversity in mental labor is less laborious than much dwelling on one or a few subjects. As many subjects, therefore, as can be taught *well* should be taught.

to the natural, the objective, the developing method; to insre our pupils with higher and nobler aspirations than are to be found in monthly averages : and let the measure of time devoted to each subject, and the methods employed in teaching the same, be determined, not by the question, How shall we obtain the highest per cents ? but by what will best benefit our pupils in after life. This done, and there will not only be better instruction in all the branches, but much more prominence will be given to language, to composition, and to literature ; and our youth will grow up under such tuition to be more intelligent, useful, and influential citizens.

Another mistake — one which has a more direct bearing on my subject, as it affects the tastes of pupils for reading — is the pernicious method of teaching history usually pursued. I refer to the stultifying process of compelling the children of our schools to commit to memory text-books in this subject. No historian, as no mineralogist or chemist, was ever made by committing text-books to memory. History cannot be taught successfully by the *memoriter* plan. It kills the life of the subject. It disgusts the pupils and gives them a dislike for historical reading. As the pupils take no interest in the subject, it is soon forgotten, and there remains only the bitter recollection of tiresome hours devoted to what, if properly taught, brings profit and pleasure. As one of the principal objects of this paper is to show how to interest our youth in good reading, I will briefly explain, not only how history can be made intensely interesting and exceedingly instructive to pupils, but how a love of historical research can be implanted in them that will remain with them through life, and very largely influence their subsequent reading. First, all written percented examinations in this subject should be abolished. What is said in the text-book upon the topic under consideration should be read by the pupils under the direction of the teacher. The teacher should see that they thoroughly understand what they read, and at each lesson question them in brief review of the previous lesson. She should read, or cause to be read, parts of other histories or reference books (encyclopædias, gazetteers, etc.) that bear upon the subject of the lesson. She should also give out questions, the answers to which the pupils are to find for themselves ; and should encourage them in relating historical anecdotes and in giving sketches of noted events to their classmates.

But history should be taught principally *by biography*. Biography is the *soul* of history. The life of a great personage, as of Cromwell, Napoleon, or Washington, contains nearly everything of importance in the history of the time and country in which he lived. Nothing

is more entertaining to the young than the lives of the great men and women who have borne a prominent part in the world. I am not advocating a new theory. This method has been tried for two years in Cincinnati: and in one school alone, more than five hundred historical and biographical sketches were read within the past year; and in one class, sixty-four biographical sketches were given by the pupils to their classmates; and the constant allusion to other lives than those under actual discussion led to a wide field of further research. Let me say here, that in a class in United States history, I would not confine the biographical work to our own country, but would encourage the children to read and recite sketches of noted personages of other countries and of different ages. If the method briefly indicated above be pursued, the pupils will become enthusiastic in the subject of history, and will gain a vast amount of valuable information of which they would otherwise remain in ignorance; but above all, they will form the habit of and a taste for reading good books, which will remain with them through life.

Another mistake consists in giving too much time in the reading lesson to mere *imitative* reading, and not enough to logical analysis, to ascertaining the meaning of the words and sentences. Children should be impressed with the fact that the principal object of reading is to obtain the ideas and thoughts of others; and therefore they should early accustom themselves to ascertaining the meaning of what they read, that no word, no sentence may be passed over without being understood. Let me say that the dictionary should be the almost constant companion of the pupils of our grammar and high schools. Would you neglect the elocutionary side of the subject? I am asked. By no means. No one places a higher value on elocution, on the beautiful rendering of the reading lesson, than I do; but I insist that it is the duty of the teacher to see that the passage is thoroughly understood by the pupils before she attempts to drill them in the elocution.

Another mistake is to be found in the fact that the almost universal tendency in this country, of late years, has been to crowd too much into the high-school course, by putting in subjects which properly belong to colleges and universities. To attempt, as I said in one of my annual reports, to make the high school a substitute for the college and university, must result in failure. The pupils are too young. They have not the maturity of mind required to comprehend thoroughly such a course of study. In my opinion, much of the present opposition to the high-school system is directly due to this cause. To remedy the defects and make the high schools more

efficient and popular, there should be a more judicious selection of studies, and much more time should be given to English literature and to composition. At least one lesson per day should be devoted to these subjects throughout the entire course.

GEMS OF LITERATURE. — Morality, if under this head may be placed honesty, patriotism, and good-will to men, ought to come within the scope of school work; for morality in this sense is the dearest element of the good citizen, and the good citizen is the prime object of education. Our country has less lack of intelligence than of public honesty and private fair dealing, less lack of knowledge than of inclination towards a noble life; which facts show that something in the present order of society is either fundamentally wrong or deplorably weak. But where shall we seek a remedy? when and how begin to mend? The subject of moral progress does not belong solely to the religious world. It is not altogether a matter of religion; it is a matter of that good sense, that idea of public utility which considers the welfare of the immediate present, and looks with a benevolent eye to an improved manhood in the future. For morality is almost as beautiful when viewed as a guiding element to man in this world's transactions as it is when viewed as an essential to happiness in the world to come.

We cannot serve the future of this world in a better way than in taking care of the present of the children. It is in our power greatly to elevate the world in morals. We can do this by introducing into our present educational system a factor whose object shall be to give the proper direction to the child's thoughts; to implant in his mind correct conceptions of the world and his place in it, true ideas of his duty to his neighbor and his country and of his relations to the inferior world around him, which, sinking deeper and deeper with each generation, shall eventually supplant evil, and leave a soul worthy of the inspection of gods. "As a man thinketh, so is he." Children should be led to think properly, that they may be enabled to act justly and generously; and it would be far safer both for them and the community if their acts were directed by fixed principles than by sudden and untrustworthy impulses. Now, as it is undeniable that to many the age of maturity does not bring with it those established ideas of right and wrong, those healthy conceptions which characterize the model citizen, I for one feel the necessity for a new feature in education, whose object shall be advancement in a moral way. I consider it our duty to attempt what I have indicated above. We owe it to the pupils, as being our fellow-creatures; to the State, as being essential to that good citizenship which is the first object of free education.

The question is as to the method. My idea, as many of you know, is to make use of the gems of literature.

The literature of the world embodies a universal moral creed. In its fulness here and there may be found the holy teachings of the Bible, in language pleasing to the ear of youth, and in form adapted to his understanding. It inculcates all the substantial teachings of the Scriptures without awakening the suspicion that the private realm of devotional form is to be invaded.

A broad-minded selection of noble passages, though it may not be able to do all we could wish in a moral way, can certainly do much to raise men to a high moral, political, and social plane. It may not make men prayerful, but it can make them respectful and respectable. It may not give them the wisdom of statesmen, but it can make them intelligent voters and fervent patriots. It may not fit them for a future life, but it can do much towards making this one pleasant to themselves and for their fellow-men. It can put a light into their hearts that will illumine many of earth's darkest places.

I believe that gems of literature introduced into our schools, if properly taught, will be able to do these things; partly by their own directive influence on the young mind, but principally as being such a draught upon the fountain of higher literature as shall result in an abiding thirst for noble reading. The right kind of reading will induce the right kind of thinking, and proper thinking will insure correct acting.

What harmony the introduction of literature into our schools assures us! The religious world will get from it all it ever asked or expected from the Bible. The secular world will get from it nothing it could possibly object to. At the shrine of noble thoughts the devotees of all creeds may bow as brothers. Let the public schools be the instrument of forming this common love for the noble and beautiful, and who but will acknowledge they have performed a work of greatest utility to man, and added a thousand-fold to their present value as factors in human progress? Heretofore the boy's education has been no broader than his business expectations; his happiness as a man and his worth as a citizen have not been taken into account. The principles are too narrow for an age that is looking for good men as well as for good accountants and grammarians. They are unnecessarily narrow: they leave, as it were, broad fields of noble soil untilled, and this soil must be tilled to bear fruit. For example, a man cannot be a patriot, except negatively, until he has been led to understand and value patriotism. But on abstract or grand subjects, like patriotism, there is an unwillingness or incapacity in most minds to think. Such

minds must be enlarged before patriotism can be anything to them but a barren name; but may not patriotic passages, under a wise teacher, promote the necessary growth? For who, even among the educated, has not felt a tinge of shame at the dulness of his own patriotism on reading Grimké's beautiful lines, "We cannot honor our country with too deep a reverence. We cannot love her with an affection too pure and fervent. We cannot serve her with an energy of purpose or a faithfulness of zeal too steadfast and ardent. And what is our country? It is not the East, with her hills and her valleys, with her countless sails, and the rocky ramparts of her shores. It is not the North, with her thousand villages and her harvest-home, with her frontiers of the lake and the ocean. It is not the West, with her forest-sea and her inland isles, with her luxuriant expanses clothed in the verdant corn, with her beautiful Ohio and her majestic Missouri. Nor is it yet the South, opulent in the mimic snow of her cotton, in the rich plantations of the rustling cane, and in the golden robes of her rice-fields. What are these but the sister families of one greater, better, holier family, — our country?" Or Scott's, beginning, —

> "Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
> Who never to himself hath said,
> 'This is my own, my native land'?"

What I have said of patriotism applies to all the elements of great-mindedness.

The practice, therefore, of memorizing the choice thoughts of our best writers should be made a prominent feature of school work. Oliver Wendell Holmes says, "There is no place which an author's thoughts can nestle in so securely as the memory of a school-boy or a school-girl." It is also in accord with the advice of Arthur Helps, who says, "We should lay up in our minds a store of goodly thoughts in well-wrought words, which shall be a living treasure of knowledge always with us, and from which, at various times, and amidst all the shifting of circumstances, we may be sure of drawing some comfort, guidance, and sympathy."

The idea of its introduction is not new in the history of education. In a similar manner the Germans have been long in the habit of training their children in the knowledge and admiration of the literature of their own land. The Arabs, the most civilized nation of the ancient world, taught their young to repeat the undying thoughts of their poets, under the beautiful name of "unstrung pearls."

Plato pictures the boys on long benches in the schools of Greece, receiving moral instruction through learning and reciting the poetry of her classic authors.

For the greater part, the selections for the younger children should consist of entire pieces, and of such as are calculated to develop their emotional natures — the imagination, love of home and parents, kindness to dumb animals, etc. — and to give them correct rules of action. Those for the more advanced pupils should consist principally of brief extracts, containing grand and ennobling thoughts calculated to incite them to higher aspirations in life, to lead them into pure fields of English literature, and to teach them to love and reverence our great authors. In the selection of gems, poetry has the preference, for it inculcates a double beauty, — beauty as thought and beauty as composition. It is more easily committed, and as a rule longer retained. "The taste for harmony, the poetical ear," says Miss Aiken, "if ever acquired, is so almost in infancy. The flow of numbers easily impresses itself on the memory, and is with difficulty erased. By the aid of verse, a store of beautiful imagery and glowing sentiment may be gathered up as the amusement of childhood, which in riper years may beguile the heavy hours of languor, solitude, and sorrow; may enforce sentiments of piety, humility, and tenderness; may soothe the soul to calmness, rouse it to honorable exertions, or fire it with virtuous indignation."

"They who have known what it is," remarks Willmott, in "Pleassure, etc., of Literature," "when afar from books, in solitude, or in travelling, or in intervals of worldly care, to feed on poetical recollections, to recall the sentiments and images which retain by association the charm that early years once gave them, will feel the inestimable value of committing to memory, in the prime of its power, what it will receive and indelibly retain. He who has drunk from the pure springs of intellect in his youth will continue to draw from them in the heat, the burden, and the decline of the day. The corrupted streams of popular entertainment flow by him unregarded."

The great Coleridge says, "Poetry has been to me 'an exceeding great reward.' It has soothed my afflictions; it has multiplied and refined my enjoyments; it has endeared my solitude; and it has given me the habit of wishing to discover the good and beautiful in all that meets and surrounds me."

All the selections should be recited in concert and individually from the platform.

You are aware that years ago it was almost the universal custom for teachers to set apart Friday afternoon for declamation; but the

exercise in declamation differed widely from memorizing and reciting gems of thought, which I advocate. Then the pupils were permitted to commit to memory whatever *they* thought best. The result was, that in a majority of cases the selections contained no literary or other merit. They were made more from a desire on the part of the pupil to have something "new," or to create a laugh, than from any other cause. The time spent in committing such pieces was, in my opinion, worse than wasted, for there was nothing in them worth remembering. Their effect was to vitiate the tastes of the pupils for good literature, rather than to give them a love of it. It was not so much what the pupils memorized, as how they declaimed. In short, everything was sacrificed to declamation. In my opinion, declamation, a subject almost entirely neglected in public schools of late years, is a very valuable exercise. Its tendency is to give pupils confidence in themselves; to make them more self-possessed; and above all, to make them better readers. These worthy objects can be better accomplished by reciting "gems" than by declaiming long pieces, as was formerly the custom; for every member, even of an entire class, can recite a short extract within the time of an ordinary recitation, and each learn from hearing the others declaim the same selection. But important as declamation is in itself, it is secondary to the great object I desire to accomplish: viz., storing the minds of our youth with grand and ennobling thoughts, clothed in beautiful language; thoughts that will incite them to noble aspirations in life; thoughts that inculcate virtue, patriotism, love of God, of father, of mother, kindness to dumb animals, and that give correct rules of action.

How to teach. — At least one hour per week should be given to this literary work in all the district, grammar, and high schools throughout the country.

In Cincinnati, a part of this time is taken from that assigned to morning exercises, and a part from Friday afternoon. However, this is left to the discretion of the teacher.

I recommend eight lines as a fair amount for each week's work. At this rate the pupils, in passing through the district and grammar schools, would commit 2,560 lines, and in passing through the district, grammar, and high schools, 3,840 lines, which is equivalent in amount to one hundred and twenty-eight pages of one of our Fifth Readers.

Important as it is, it is not enough that the pupils simply memorize the selections. Each one of them should be made the subject of a lesson to be given by the teacher.

For example, in presenting to the pupils for memorizing this beautiful passage from Whittier's "Snow Bound,"—

> "Alas for him who never sees
> The stars shine through his cypress-trees!
> Who, hopeless, lays his dead away,
> Nor looks to see the breaking day
> Across the mournful marbles play!
> Who hath not learned in hours of faith
> The truth, to flesh and sense unknown,
> That Life is ever lord of Death,
> And Love can never lose its own,"—

the teacher should give a talk on the immortality of the soul, on the fond anticipation of meeting our dear ones beyond the grave, on the deplorable condition of him who does not believe in the future life. She should speak of the beauties of "Snow Bound," the greatest American idyl, and give the connection in which these lines occur; should bring out the meaning of "the stars shine through his cypress-trees" and every other expression: in brief, should see that the pupils thoroughly understand every word and phrase; that they give the substance of the passage in their own language and make the proper application of the same, before requiring them to commit it to memory. But above all, she should endeavor to imbue their minds with the spirit of the extract.

Again, suppose a lesson is to be given on the protection of insect-destroying birds, — and such lessons should be given in every school-house in the land: how could it be more impressively done than by telling the story of the "Birds of Killingworth," by Longfellow, and drawing from it the lesson intended to be conveyed by the author, and then fixing that lesson in the minds of the pupils by having them memorize (after thorough preparation) the following noble lines of the Preceptor? —

> "Do you ne'er think what wondrous beings these?
> Do you ne'er think who made them, and who taught
> The dialect they speak, where melodies
> Alone are the interpreters of thought?
> Whose household words are songs in many keys,
> Sweeter than instrument of man e'er caught?
> Whose habitations in the tree-tops even
> Are half-way houses on the road to heaven!
> Think every morning when the sun peeps through
> The dim leaf-latticed windows of the grove,
> How jubilant the happy birds renew
> Their old melodious madrigals of love!
> And when you think of this, remember too
> 'T is always morning somewhere, and above
> The awakening continents, from shore to shore,
> Somewhere the birds are singing evermore."

Yes, in this beautiful world that God has made for us,

> "'T is always morning somewhere, and above
> The awakening continents, from shore to shore,
> Somewhere the birds are singing evermore."

What an opportunity is given in this work for our teachers to impart moral instruction; to cultivate the emotional nature of children; to inspire them with a love of the noble, the good, and the true! Such instruction must bear beautiful fruits.

After the selection has been thoroughly memorized, the attention of the teacher should be given to the elocution, — to the beautiful delivery of the same. This can be well done by concert drill. The concert should be supplemented by individual recitation. If, however, for want of time, any part of the work indicated above has to be neglected, it should be the individual recitation. As I said before, declamation is secondary to the committal to memory of literary gems.

As the value of these extracts to one in after life will depend in no small degree upon the accuracy with which they are memorized in youth, the teacher should see that they are committed to memory, word for word. In order to do this, time should be taken from the grammar or language lessons for the pupils to write the extracts from memory. This would also be an excellent practical exercise in capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

Let me say here, that this literary work trains the memory: there is perhaps no weaker point in the school system of our country than the frequent neglect of this absolute necessity in child culture. The memory needs as much strengthening by exercise as the muscles of the arm; but it should be employed, as here, in storing the mind with what is *worth* remembering.

It also enriches the vocabulary of the pupils by giving them many new words and beautiful combinations, whereby they will obtain a better command over the English language.

The teachers should give sketches of the lives and writings of the best and most worthy authors, at least to all the pupils above the fourth year of school, and encourage them to find out for themselves interesting facts concerning these authors and their works, and to reproduce them either in compositions or in oral talks before their classmates, as I have already recommended in connection with the lessons on history. I also recommend that the teacher, or a pupil under her advice, read the entire piece, when appropriate, from which the extract is taken, or some other selection from the same author: as one of "Timothy Titcomb's" letters, by J. G. Holland; a story from Hawthorne's "Wonder Book"; a selection from "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table," etc.

The name of the author, when known (I require the full name), should be given at the close of each reading or recitation, in order to associate in the minds of the children the author's name with the selection.

In connection with this moral and literary training, and as a part of it, let me urge the importance of celebrating the birthdays of distinguished and worthy authors.

These celebrations may consist of compositions on the life of the writer, of the recitation of gems by entire classes or grades, of declamation, of reading, of singing, and of appropriate talks by teachers and friends of the schools.

Authorial-birthday celebrations interest the pupils in the writer and his works as nothing else can. They educate the whole com munity. The celebration of the birthdays of Whittier and Longfellow and Holmes and the Cary sisters and others has caused an increased demand for their books; and *every good book that goes into a family is a moral and educational force.* I repeat, *every good book that goes into a family is a moral and educational force.* It has not only multiplied the number of their readers, but that of many other of the great authors in American and English literature.

Longfellow and Whittier and Holmes, names unknown to the children of Cincinnati three years ago, are now as familiar to them as those of their own playmates. Hereafter they will be looked upon by the youth of that city not only as great and noble writers, but as dear old friends whom they fondly love. To me, this attachment of the children to those great and pure men is a touching and pleasing result of the celebrations.

These celebrations, from year to year, should include not only poets and prose writers, but also great statesmen and distinguished scientists and inventors.

> "The poets who in song translate
> Emotions they alone have read,
> The patriots stern, who challenge fate,
> And walk with more than mailed tread,
> The sages who the truth distil, —
> Let these the child love if he will."
>
> JOSEPH W. MILLER.

But we should celebrate those only who have led pure and noble lives, whose moral character and private worth will call forth the admiration of the children and set them examples worthy of imitation.

Two or three celebrations a year are all the best interests of our schools demand, but these should be made as grand and impressive

as possible; for the greater the interest that is created in the author and his writings, the better it will be for the pupils. After the birthday of an author has been celebrated, it should be appropriately observed from year to year, by devoting from fifteen minutes to half an hour to the recitation of gem-thoughts, and to review talks on his life and writings.

Having completed my suggestions on the methods of instruction, and the scope of this moral literary work, I desire to call your attention for a few minutes more fully to the good that will be accomplished by its general introduction into our schools.

Dime-Novel Reading. — One of the greatest powers for evil is the low and degrading writings our boys and girls are reading. Even educators, I fear, are not fully aroused to the terrible influence this reading is exerting upon the lives and characters of the young.

Some three years ago, in a lecture on "Fiction," before a Boston audience, the late Mr. Fields said that he visited the Pomeroy boy in prison, a few days previous, and asked him if he had ever read much. "Yes," replied the boy, "I have read a great deal." — "Well, what have you read?" — "Principally dime novels." — "What novel did you like best?" — "Buffalo Bill, because it is full of murders and pictures of murders." Doubtless this boy is naturally depraved, but the immediate cause of his committing his horrible acts was the class of reading in which he indulged. A year or two ago, a number of lads from wealthy and refined families of New York City, through the degrading influence of dime-novel reading, organized themselves into a band of burglars. Last year two youths murdered an old gentleman in Ohio, from the same cause. How frequently we read in the daily papers of boys running away from home with cards, revolvers, and dime novels in their pockets!

Yet, compared to the vast numbers of our youth who are demoralized by pernicious reading, the cases that are reported in public print are the exceptions. The influence of this reading is seen in the slang language in which our youth indulge; in their disrespect for parental authority; in their treatment of the aged; in the wrong ideas of life which they entertain; and in the general spirit of insubordination.

Let us look at the circumstances in which our youth are placed in regard to literature.

At the homes of a large part of them there is scarcely a book, except the text-books of the children themselves. At the homes of a majority of those remaining may be found a few books upon the parlor table, which are usually considered by the parent as too nice

for the children to read. It is safe to say that very few indeed of our youth have access to a good home library. That child who is trained at home to a love of reading good books is the exception. Is it any wonder, then, that our youth yield to the temptation to read the worst kind of story papers and novels, which are everywhere thrown around them? In addition to other enticements, we find near all the large school buildings of our cities, shops which keep, besides pens, pencils, and school-books, a large assortment of trashy story papers and novels. What a comment on the public schools! The venders of these papers place those having pictures of murders and Indian outrages, etc., in the windows. The children, attracted by these pictures, buy the papers and read the stories. They soon become intensely interested in the stories and in the slang language in which they are written. The boys and girls buy novels of the same or of a worse tendency for from five to ten cents. These are purchased and devoured, and thus by degrees is formed the habit of reading this pernicious class of writings. The children are not to blame. There is nothing in their home surroundings to counteract these evil tendencies. The schools have been standing by, saying, "Don't touch, don't touch," but doing nothing to interest the pupils in good reading.

Knowing from experience, as I do, that it is in the power of the schools to control almost entirely the reading of the pupils, and to implant in them correct literary tastes, I appeal to boards of education, to superintendents and teachers, to take immediate and decisive steps to make this literary training in all the grades a prominent feature of school work; as the only effectual way to keep the youth of our country from reading the terrible dime novel is to *interest them* in the writings of good authors, and this must be done, if at all, by the schools.

Literature as a Distinct Branch. — Under the present system, the study of literature as a distinct branch of education is not attempted till the tenth year of school, when but one in twenty is remaining in school; and I will guarantee that former classes in the high schools gathered fewer of the pearls of literature at the completion of their course than is possible with the common-school classes under the plan now in operation in Cincinnati. And it should not be forgotten that the one in twenty that takes the high-school course is the one for whose welfare we need have but little apprehension. We can trust him. It is among the nineteen who fall by the wayside that we shall find subjects for our misgivings. It is here that we must exert ourselves as formers of character and developers of taste.

In other words, if literature has any elevating influences, its fittest field is the common school; for here those influences are most in demand, and here is the single opportunity of reaching a large and especially needy class of pupils.

But let us look at the matter in another light. Pupils have heretofore entered upon the study of literature in the high schools with almost no previous knowledge of literary character or development of literary taste. The result of gem-learning, in addition to its grand object, the ennobling of the mind, will be to lay the foundation for deeper literary culture in advanced pupils, — to activate the mind in this direction, and so store it with knowledge that the commencement of this branch of education in the high schools shall be further advanced than its termination has been heretofore.

THE CHILDREN INTERESTED IN GEM-LEARNING. — I have never known anything in school work that interested children more than this. The interest, too, is not confined to the upper grades, but pervades all the classes, from the first year of school through the high school.

Children love to commit to memory beautiful selections, and recite them at home and at school. They love to hear of the lives and writings of good authors, and to talk about them to their fathers and mothers.

Again, these literary exercises relieve the monotony of school. Their tendency is to give the pupils a love of school, and therefore to secure a more regular and larger attendance. They do much to make the school strong with the people, an object that every teacher should endeavor to accomplish.

In conclusion, I desire to call your attention to the remarks of Mrs. Elizabeth Gale, of Mt. Healthy, Ohio, as they present the subject of memorizing selections in another light. Mrs. Gale is the aunt of J. G. Holland. "Dear old aunt," writes Dr. Holland, "she is the only living link that binds me to the last generation." Mrs. Gale, though ninety-three years of age on the 17th of last December, — Whittier's birthday, — is bright and intelligent.

It was one of the happiest moments of my life when that dear old lady, then in her ninety-third year, holding in her hand a pamphlet of selections I had sent her, said to me, "Mr. Peaslee, you don't know how much good you are doing by introducing these selections into the schools. You don't know how the children will appreciate them when they are old; what a source of consolation they will be to them then; how they will love to say them over and over again. Why," said she, "thinking over and repeating the little pieces I learned in childhood is one of the greatest comforts left me now."

She then recited a number of selections. Among them was one entitled "To my Watch," which she learned at home when a child only four years of age, from hearing her brothers recite it. I had the piece written from her dictation, and printed, with the change, suggested by Dr. Holland, of a single word.

TO MY WATCH.

Little monitor, by thee
Let me learn what I should be;
I 'll learn the round of life to fill,
Useful and progressive still.

Thou canst gentle hints impart
How to regulate the heart;
When I wind thee up at night,
Mark each fault and set it right;
Let me search my bosom, too,
And my daily thoughts review.

I 'll mark the movements of my mind,
Nor be easy when I find
Latent errors rise to view,
Till all be regular and true.

This incident needs no comment from me. It tells, more strongly than any words of my own, of how wonderfully the memory retains little pieces committed to its precious care in early childhood.

Yes, these beautiful selections will be remembered and will influence our children for good when the technicalities of their grammar, the abstrusities of their arithmetic, and the obscure locations of their geographies are forgotten.

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Vol. I.—SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER, 1880.—No. I.

CONTENTS.

Frontispiece, Steel Engraving of Barnas Sears, D. D., LL. D.
I. Text-Books and their Uses. *Wm. T. Harris, LL. D.*
II. Harmony in Systems of Education. *James McCosh, D. D.*
III. Educational Progress in the United States during the last Fifty Years. *Barnas Sears, D. D., LL. D.*
IV. The Renascence and its Influence on Education. *Rev. R. H. Quick, A. M.*
V. University Examinations for Women. *Miss E. T. Lander.*
VI. Persephone. A Poem. *Mrs. Louisa P. Hopkins.*
VII. A Southern View of Education. *Prof. Edward S. Joynes.*
VIII. President Hayes's Address on Education. *Rev. A. D. Mayo.*
IX. EDITORIALS.—Reasons for the new Educational Magazine.—The Mundella Educational Bill.—The Concord School of Philosophy.—"State Education a Help or Hindrance."
X. Literature.

Vol. I.—NOVEMBER—DECEMBER, 1880.—No. II.

CONTENTS.

Frontispiece, Steel Engraving of Don Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, LL. D., Buenos Ayres.
I. Results of Methods of Teaching. *Hon. John W. Dickinson.*
II. Technical Training in American Schools. *E. E. White, LL. D.*
III. The Quincy Methods. *B. G. Northrop, LL. D.*
IV. Schopenhauer on Education. Translated by *G. A. Hill, A. M.*
V. Moral Training in our Public Schools. *George Howland, A. M.*
VI. Over a New Road. *Anna C. Brackett.*
VII. An Experiment in Reading Greek at Sight. *A. C. Merriam, Ph. D.*
VIII. Object Teaching: its Purpose and Province. *Prof. N. A Calkins.*
IX. Learning or Training: Which? *Albert Prescott Marble, Ph. D.*
X. The Renascence and its Influence on Education. *Rev. R. H. Quick, A. M.*
XI. The Relation of Normal-School Work to the State. *S. N. Fellows, D. D.*
XII. EDITORIALS.—Mr. Thomas Hughes' Visit to America.—Prosperity and Education.—Missionary Educators.—Education in Paris.
XIII. Literature.

Vol. I.—JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1881.—No. III.

CONTENTS.

Frontispiece, Steel Engraving of William T. Harris, LL. D.
I. Four Centuries of Scotch Education. *John Russell, F. E. I. S., F. R. H. S., London.*
II. The Function of the Thinker in Education. *H. H. Morgan, A. M., St. Louis.*
III. The Best Method of Examining and Certificating Teachers. *Prof. H. E. Shepherd, Baltimore.*
IV. Should Public High Schools be placed under Local Authorities and State Supervision? An English View of the Question. *Prof. S. S. Laurie, A. M., F. R. S. E., Edinburgh.*
V. History in its Relations to Practical Life. *Selah Howell, A. M., Boston.*
VI. The Sacredness of Personality a First Principle of Froebel's Methods. *Elizabeth P. Peabody, Concord.*
VII. The Lancastrian System. *E. O. Vaile, Chicago.*
VIII. A Shrine to Poetry. *Joshua Kendall, A. M., Cambridge.*
IX. International Convention of Instructors of Deaf-Mutes at Milan. *Edward M. Gallaudet, Ph. D., LL. D., Washington.*
X. Instruction of Deaf-Mutes. *Miss Susanna E. Hale, London.*
XI. Common Sense in Classics: Attic Greek and Augustan Latin. *E. R. Humphreys, LL. D., Boston.*
XII. Which is the True Ideal of the Public School? *John D. Philbrick, LL. D., Boston.*

Vol. I.—MARCH—APRIL, 1881.—No. IV.

CONTENTS.

Frontispiece, Steel Engraving of Thomas Sherwin, Late Head-Master Boston English High School.
I. The British Race. *Prof. J. H. Seeley*, author of *Ecce Homo*, England.
II. The Peabody Agency.
III. Richard Grant White *vs.* The Public Schools of the United States. *B. G. Lovejoy, Washington, D.C.*
IV. Is our Public-School System a Success? *George J. Luckey, Pittsburg, Pa.*
V. Real Education: Its Principles and a Little-Known Chapter in its History. *William Jo'ly, A. M., H. M. S., Scotland.*
VI. The Printing Press as an Instrument of Education. *Wm. T. Harris, LL. D.*
VII. Sketch of Thomas Sherwin. *John D. Philbrick, LL. D.*
VIII. Didactics in Iowa University. *S. N. Fellows, LL. D.*
IX. The New English High School, Boston, with Engraving.
X. Archæology.—Philology.—Science and Art. *Prof. R. F. Leighton, Ph. D.*

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